

Intrastate transplant of mountain goats in Utah is completed

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United Press International

Wildlife biologists have completed the second ever intrastate transplant of Rocky Mountain goats in Utah, using a high-altitude French helicopter and a net gun.

"We captured eight Rocky Mountain goats — six nannies and two billies — and transported them from Lone Peak to the Uinta Range near Bald Mountain and released them," said Steve Phillips, spokesman for the state Wildlife Resources Division.

The goats were snared from a herd estimated at 75 to 100 animals near Lone Peak in Little Cottonwood Canyon. They were sedated and vaccinated and airlifted in wooden crates to U.S. Forest Service land near Bald Mountain, about 45 miles away, Phillips said.

"This is actually a re-introduction. Forest Service records indicate there were goats up there historically," Phillips said. "In 1917 there was a report by a ranger who recalled seeing both mountain goats and sheep, so apparently they were up there. But they were probably hunted out years and years ago."

The transplant operation conducted over two days is an effort to begin what would be the state's fourth mountain goat herd.

The first modern introduction in the state was a 1967 transplant to Lone Peak from Washington State, Phillips said. By 1974, they had taken hold and the first intrastate transplant was made last year — to Tusher Mountain

in the Beaver Mountain Range.

Forest Service and state biologists rented a high-powered French Lama turbo-jet helicopter, which is capable of maneuvering at altitudes near 10,000 feet above sea level, to get at the goats, Phillips said.

"The guys would net them with the net gun and the helicopter would hover low and the guys would jump out and subdue the animals and put horn guards — really just pieces of garden hose — on their horns," he said. "They would put them in a mesh bag and put blindfolds on them and transport them to the bottom of the hill as quickly as possible."

Wildlife biologists then administered a battery of shots, including a tranquilizer, "to calm them down and get them ready for the trip," penicillin, muscle relaxant and vitamins, Phillips said.

The goats were loaded into wooden cages containing ice to keep them cool during the ride and the helicopters carried them away, he said.

The eight transplanted animals "may at some point become a huntable population. But, there are so many other reasons to introduce them to the area," Phillips said. "Hikers love to see them, they're so dramatic, and photographers think it's really neat."

Money from hunting permits paid for the transplant, even though it will likely be years before hunting is allowed in the Bald Mountain area, he said.

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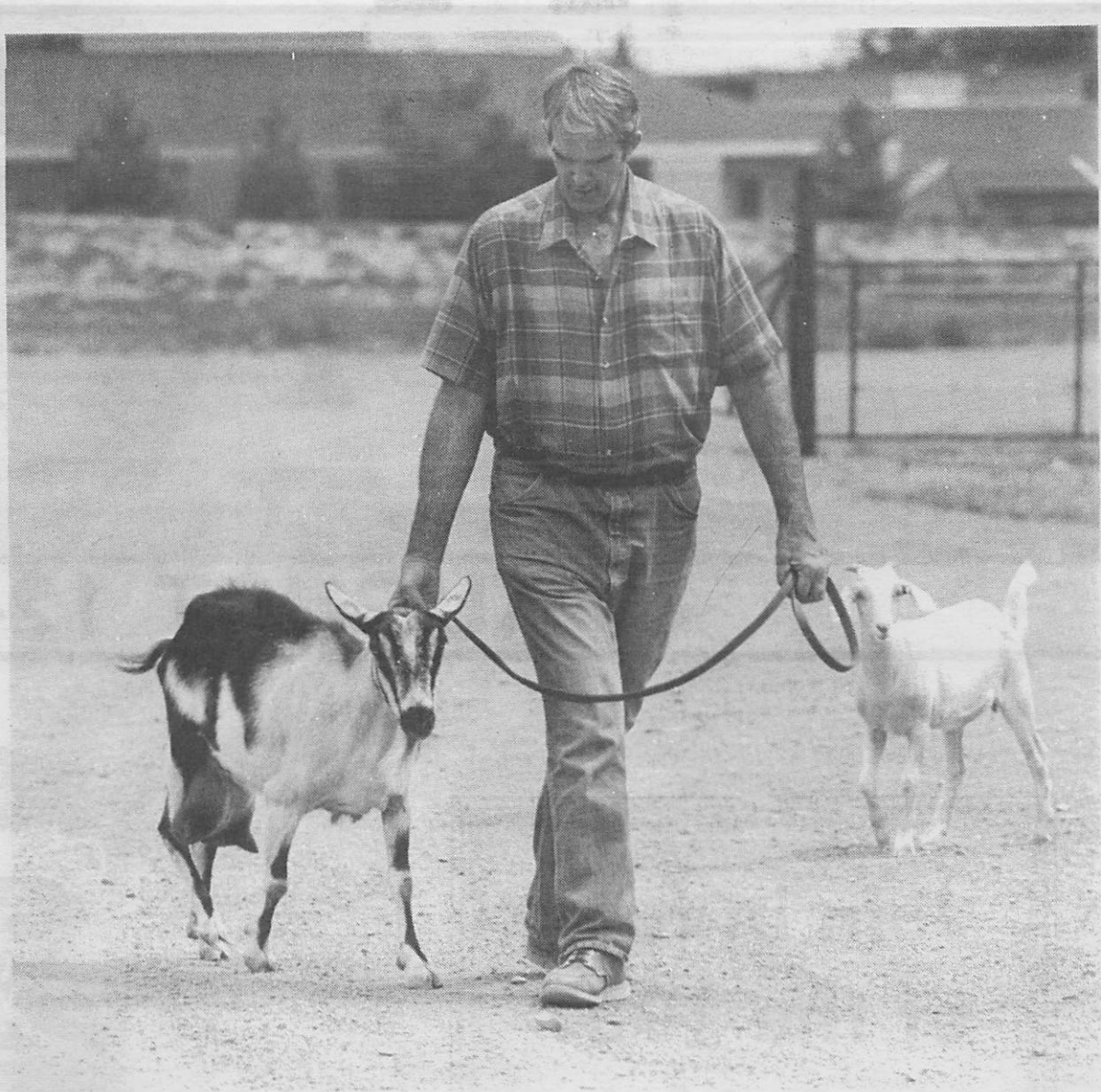
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